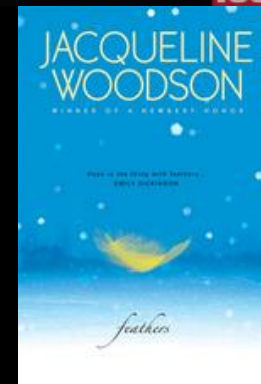


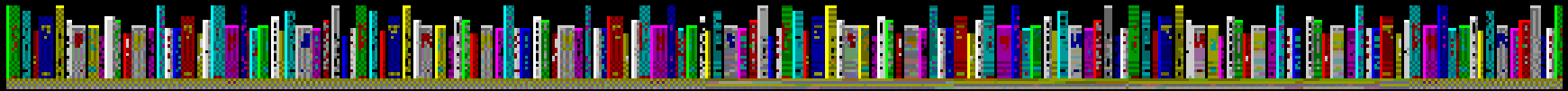
# Deaf Characters in Adolescent Literature, Comics , and Graphic Novels,

Sharon Pajka-West, Ph.D.



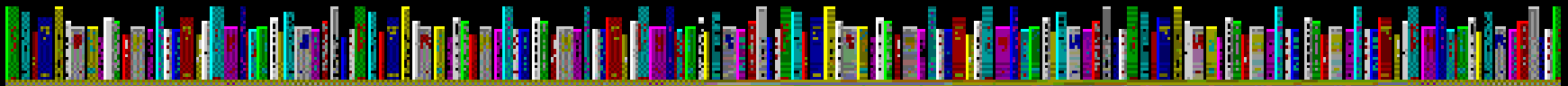
# Everything begins with a story

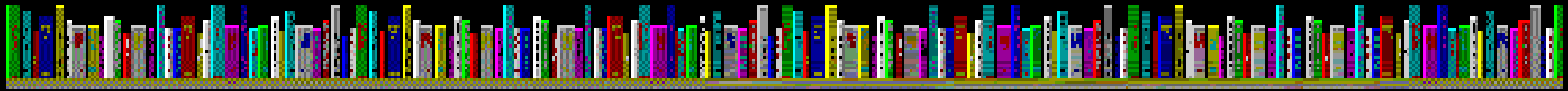
- ▣ Why did I start researching Deaf Characters?
- ▣ And, why in the world would I begin to Blog about my research?



## Goals:

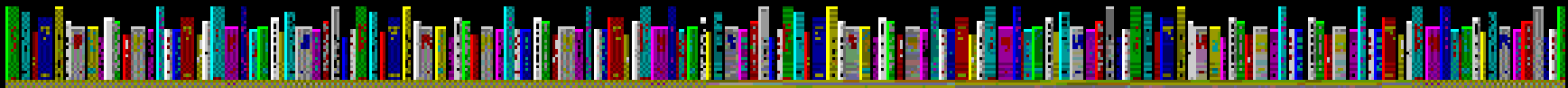
- To highlight contemporary adolescent literature texts including comics & graphic novels with a range of deaf characters
- To acknowledge the differences in portrayals of deaf characters by deaf and hearing authors
- To share resources (websites, books, and articles) highlighting children's/adolescent books with deaf characters

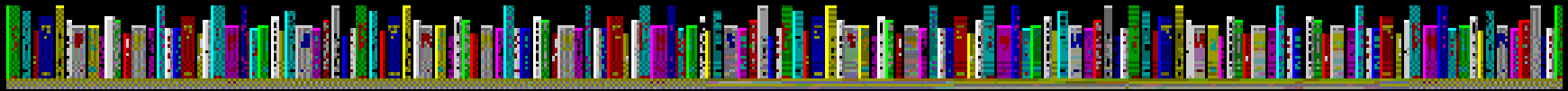




# Research Questions:

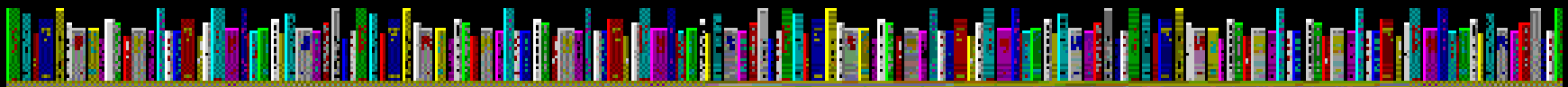
- ❑ Are deaf characters being presented as culturally Deaf characters or as pathologically deaf and disabled?
- ❑ Do readers favor deaf authors over hearing ones? If so, why?
- ❑ How do deaf and hearing adult readers perceive deaf characters in adolescent literature?

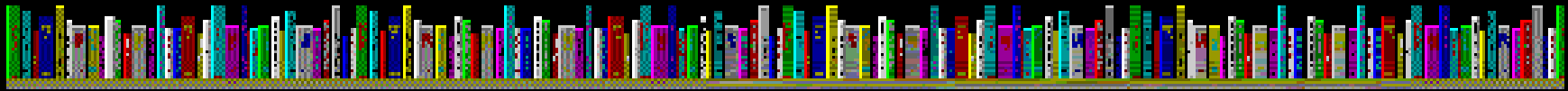




# Problem

- Acquiring fictional books with deaf characters can be time-consuming and challenging.
- Few scholars have conducted research on the topic.
  - of those even fewer have focused their attentions to adolescent fiction



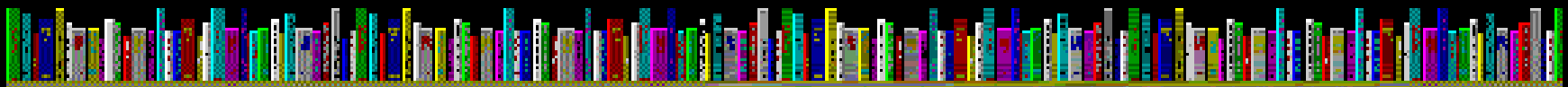


# Research on the portrayals of deaf characters

- ❑ Lack of attention to the topic (Civiletto & Schirmer, 2000).
- ❑ Limited empirical research (Burns, 1950; Guella, 1983; Krentz, 2002, Wilding-Diaz, 1993).
- ❑ A lack of understanding regarding the representation of deaf characters in literature (Batson & Bergman, 1985; Bergman, 1987; Burns, 1980; Krentz, 2002; Panara, 1972; Taylor, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, Schwartz, 1980; Wilding-Diaz, 1993).
- ❑ Deafness used as a literary device (Batson & Bergman, 1985; Bergman, 1987; Burns, 1980; Krentz, 2002; Panara, 1972; Taylor, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, Schwartz, 1980; Wilding-Diaz, 1993).

# Influential Research: Literature Pertaining to Diversity and Multiculturalism in Adolescent Fiction

Despite decades of research affirming culturally authentic children's literature and the merits of multicultural literature, a coexisting body of research reveals the lack of culturally authentic texts (Applebee, 1992; Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Ernest, 1995; Larrick, 1965; Sherriff, 2005; Taxel, 1986).



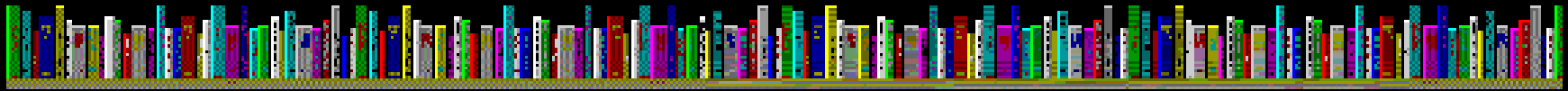
## When diverse characters are portrayed realistically and authentically in fiction,

- ▣ Students' attitudes about race and gender are affected positively (Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Jetton & Savage-Davis, 2005).
- ▣ Students begin to understand a sense of 'self' (Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980; Grice & Vaughn, 1992).
- ▣ Students show an increase in enjoyment (Smith, 1995).
- ▣ Students who had been identified as low ability students showed an interest in books with diverse characters. Researchers discovered that these children's reading levels had been misrepresented as grades lower than the students could read (Grice & Vaughn, 1992).



# The Educational Benefits of Comics:

- Goldstein's (1986) study on vocabulary instruction resulted in student improvement on standardized test scores when students studied vocabulary from comics & cartoons.
- Wright and Sherman (1999) postulated that teachers should include comic books and cartoons in the classroom because they are:
  - ▣ cost effective,
  - ▣ have low-readability levels,
  - ▣ are of great interest to students

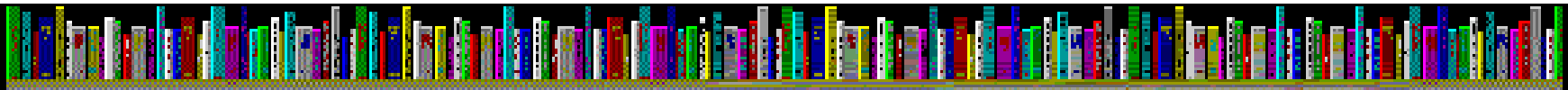


# Findings: Research Question 1

Are deaf characters being presented as culturally Deaf or as pathologically deaf and disabled?

The majority of the hearing authors presented the cultural perspective model.

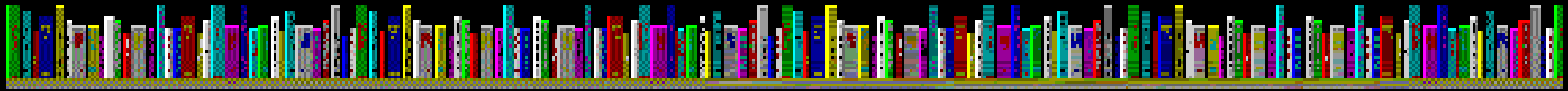
- The pathological perspective model was underrepresented in the books by the hearing authors;
- yet, the majority of deaf authors included the pathological perspective.
- Reasons why these deaf authors included more pathological perspective statements while the hearing authors included more cultural perspective statements:
  - 1. lived experience
  - 2. fewer deaf characters in books by deaf authors
  - 3. fewer 'D'eaf authors



# Findings: Research Question 2

Do these readers favor deaf authors over hearing ones?

- The Deaf participants along with the participants as a whole preferred the books written by the hearing authors
  1. as better describing realistic deaf people,
  2. for presenting deaf characters adequately and realistically, and
  3. for the authors' portrayals of deaf characters matching their own perceptions of deaf people.
    - *In general, the Deaf participants were more critical of the deaf authors while the familiar participants, although as a group preferred the books by the hearing authors, were more critical of the hearing authors.*
- Participants mentioned their preference for a spectrum of deaf characters.
  - *The books used in this study that were written by hearing authors included a variety of characters.*

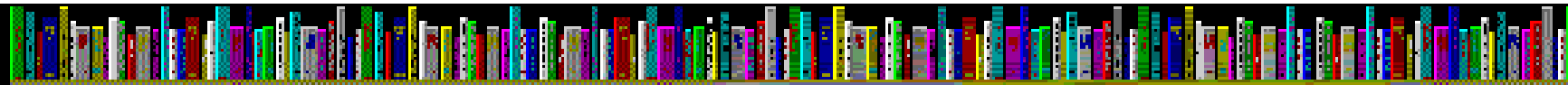


# Findings: Research Question 3

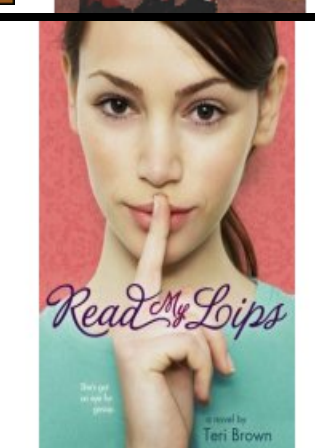
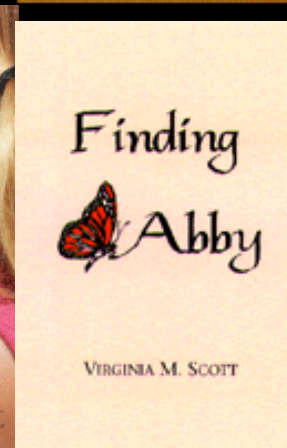
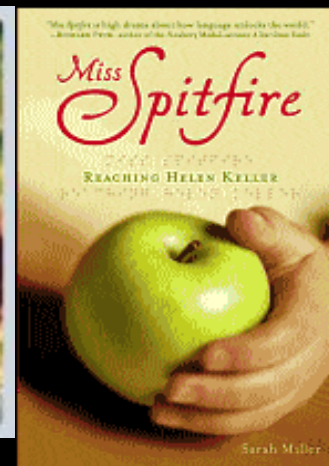
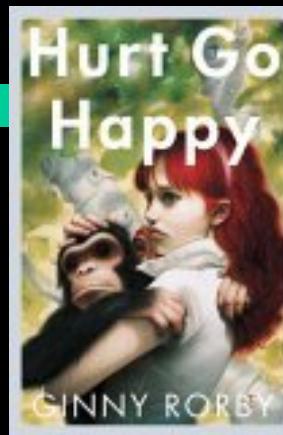
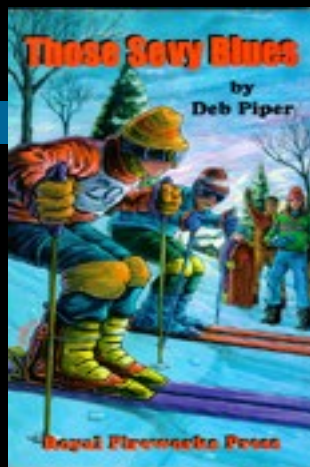
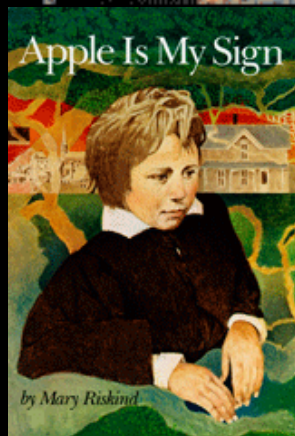
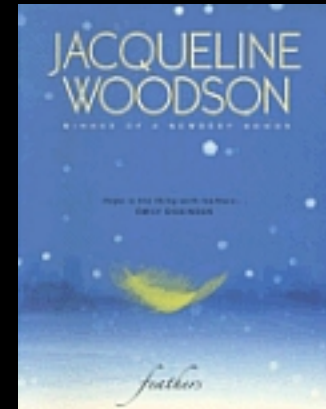
How do readers perceive deaf characters?

Themes that emerged from the Reader Response Surveys included the participants' perceptions of these characters as:

- the “normal” curious kid
- the egocentric spoiled brat
- the advocate
- those dependent upon the majority culture
- those isolated
- those searching for their identities.

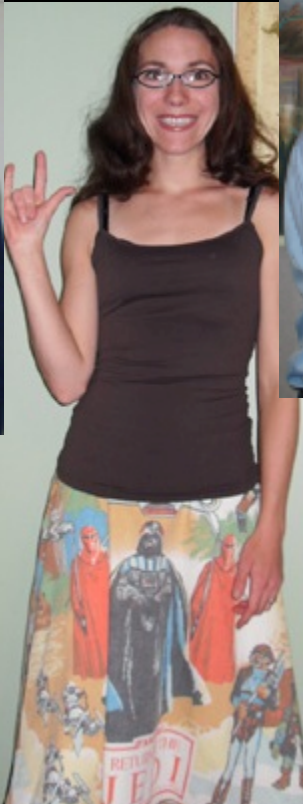


But what does all this research  
have to do with the  
young people?



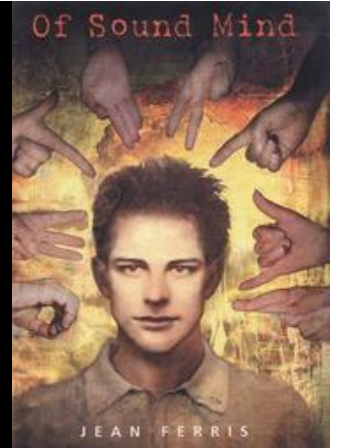


# (author interviews & insider tips)



# *SPOTLIGHT on CHARACTERS*

## *Of Sound Mind, (2001) Jean Ferris*



### ■ Deaf Characters

#### ➤ Ben Roper, Ph.D.

- Penn State Employee, Model Airplanes, Single Parent

#### ➤ Jeremy

- Self-Confident, attends "special classes" at mainstream school

#### ➤ Thomas

- Carpenter, attended Gallaudet, doesn't trust Hearing People

#### ➤ Palma

- Deaf of Deaf, attended Gallaudet, famous artist
- "She is too overly dependent on her hearing son, too helpless, too afraid, too high strung and too much the Prima Donna to be 'real' "(9d).

## *Of Sound Mind, (2001) Jean Ferris*



### ■ Jean Ferris

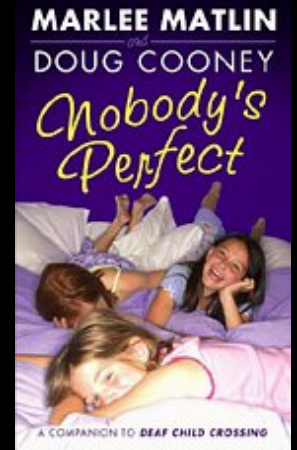
- College Degrees: Speech Pathology and Audiology.
- Ferris taught a class of deaf pre-schoolers.
- *"Those were in the days when every deaf child was supposed to learn to speak, and even then that seemed wrong to me. I could see how frustrated these little toddlers were at not being able to express themselves".*



# Books for Younger Adolescents

*Nobody's Perfect* (2006)

By Marlee Matlin & Doug Cooney



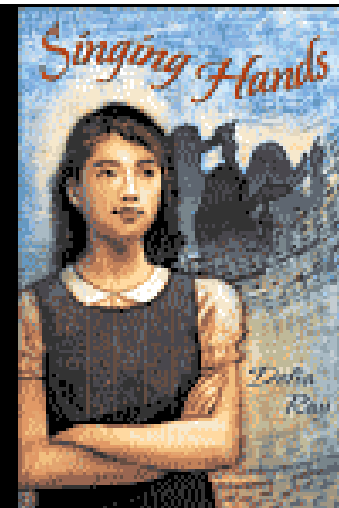
- Megan is thrown when a new girl, Alexis, ignores her gestures of friendship. Alexis is pretty, smart, and a great soccer player, but she seems intent on ignoring Megan. Alexis behaves strangely around people with disabilities which is related to her having an autistic brother. Megan, whose family and friends accept her deafness as part of their everyday lives, is shocked by this.



*Other Books in the Series*



# New Books for Younger Adolescents



*Singing Hands* (2006) by Delia Ray

- Gussie Davis is the hearing daughter of deaf parents in 1948 Birmingham, AL. She is a rebellious teen who sings out loud during the church for the deaf where her father ministers. Gussie becomes involved in missionary efforts at a black deaf church and with the Alabama School for the Deaf. Gussie comes to terms with being "the" hearing child of deaf parents.

# *Singing Hands* (2006) by Delia Ray

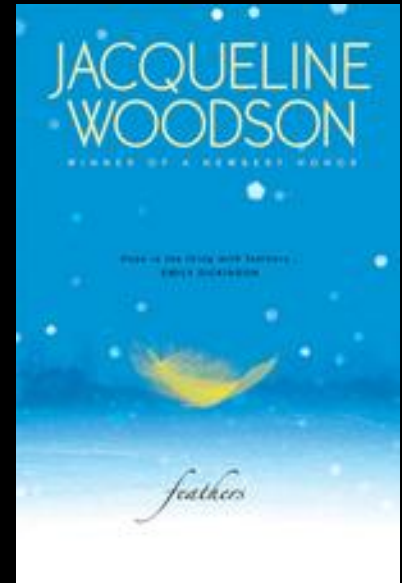


based on the author's family...

her grandfather was a Deaf preacher and a leading pioneer in the Deaf community.

# *Feathers* (2007) by Jacqueline Woodson

- Deaf character **Sean** is attractive, funny, and intelligent.



AND, from what I've found in young adult literature. Sean is the

- **FIRST African-American Deaf character who uses Sign Language**



# *Feathers (2007)* by Jacqueline Woodson

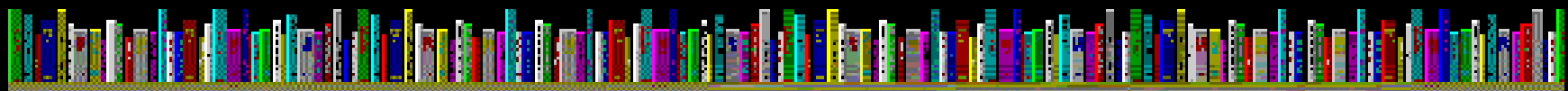
- Jacqueline Woodson studied ASL at the NY Society for the Deaf for many years



*"I wanted to speak to Deaf children as I spoke to hearing ones -- I wanted to be able to visit schools that were for the Deaf or walk into a classroom where there were deaf kids and be able to communicate with them without an interpreter. Over the years, I've found that this makes SUCH a difference for the young person"*

# Research on Deaf Characters in Comics & Graphic Novels:

- What we know:
  - The benefits of comics with diverse characters are extensive for reluctant readers who seldom find characters like themselves.
- What was happening:
  - My students held impromptu gatherings about the comics they were reading in their spare time. As an acknowledged useful teaching tool and clearly of interest to my students, I investigated using comics and graphic novels in my classroom.



# Findings: Realistic



Maya Lopez, (aka Echo & Ronin)

- ▣ debuted in *Daredevil* as a love interest for Matt Murdock.
- ▣ now appears in the arc of the most recent issues of *The New Avengers*



# Artist/Creator David Mack

Although Maya's character is not perfect, nor is she idealistic, in many ways her story is a realistic account of a deaf child growing up isolated from other deaf people and then later finding her Deaf identity and self-confidence to be herself

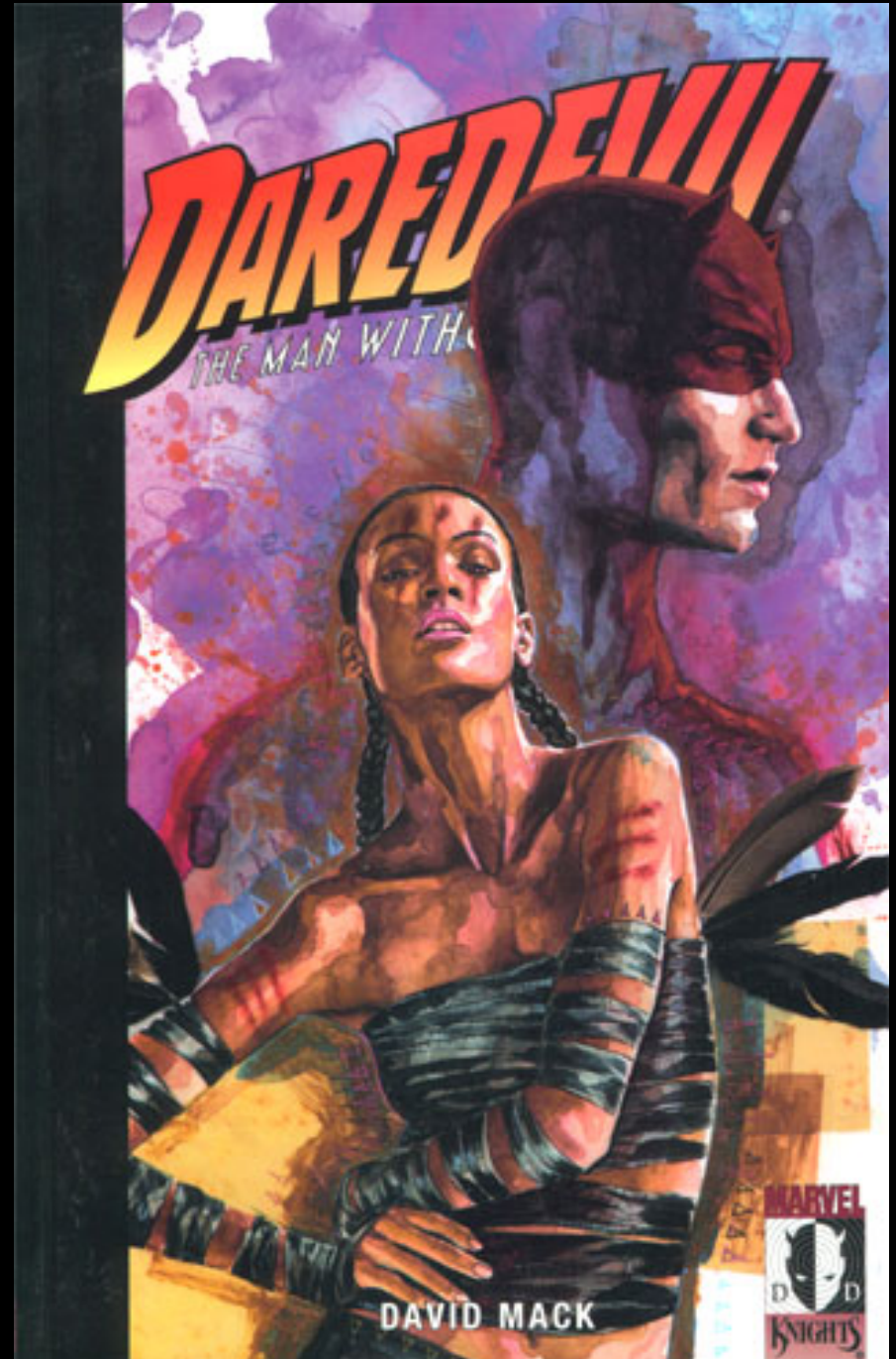
*David Mack (pictured right)*





# Echo: Diversity

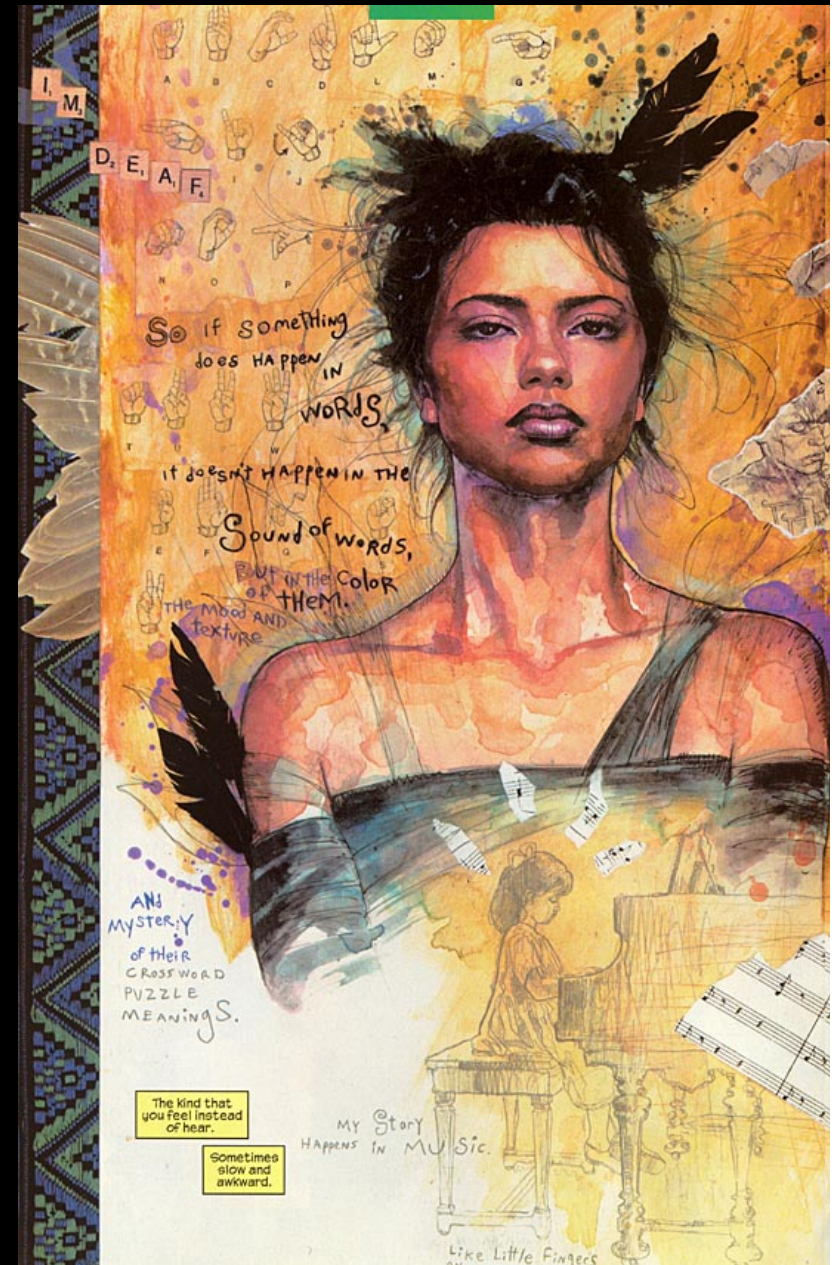
- biracial Latina Native American Indian who embraces her multiple languages and heritages

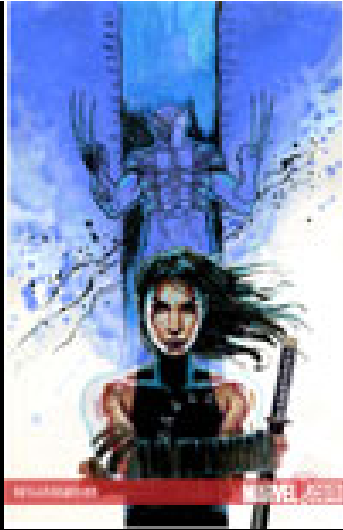


# Echo: Communication

equipped with several ways to communicate:

- art and performance,
- Indian Sign Language,
- American Sign Language, &
- lip-reading.





## Echo (*Daredevil & New Avengers*)

The Secret Invasion is here!

Have the Skrulls infiltrated the Avengers?

Is Maya Lopez the only one  
with proof?

Will she live to tell the tale?

All this and a major Avengers  
hook up!





# 36 Interviews on the Blog

- Lois Hodge- *A Season of Change*
- Doug Cooney- *Leading Ladies*
- Jean Andrews- *The Flying Fingers Club*
- Ginny Rorby- *Hurt Go Happy*
- Jean Ferris- *Of Sound Mind*
- T.C. Boyle- *Talk Talk*
- Penny Warner- *Dead Man's Hand*
- Jodi Cutler Del Dottore- *Rally Caps*
- Delia Ray- *Singing Hands*
- Jamie Berke- *About.com*
- David Mack- *Marvel Comics' Daredevil*
- Sarah Miller- *Miss Spitfire*
- Christine Harris- *Mask of the Jackal*
- Rachel Stolzman- *The Sign for Drowning*
- Elizabeth Boschini & Rachel Chaikof- *Ellie's Ears*
- Jacqueline Woodson- *Feathers*
- Clint Kelly- *Echo*

- J.G. Martinson- *Deception's Full Circle*
- Megan McDonald- *Changes for Julie*
- Anne Colledge- *Falling Into Fear*
- Janice Greene- *Read My Lips*
- Eleanor Robins- *Just Be Yourself*
- Tami Lee Santimyer--actress
- Josh Swiller-*The Unheard*
- Steve Kluger-*My Most Excellent Year*
- Paul Rowe- *The Silent Time*
- Dandi Daley Mackall- *Love Rules*
- Nadia Wheatley- *Listening to Mondrian*
- Gina Oliva- *Alone in the Mainstream*
- Meg Burden- *Northlander*
- Teri Brown- *Read My Lips*
- Ann Clare LeZotte- *T4*
- Myron Uhlberg- *Hands of My Father*
- Linda Kurtz Kingsley-*Signs of Jays*
- Emily Arnold McCully-*My Heart Glow*
- CF Brunner *Isles of View*

# Deaf Authors/ Professionals



*Rachel Chaikof*

*Lois Hodge*



J.G. Martinson

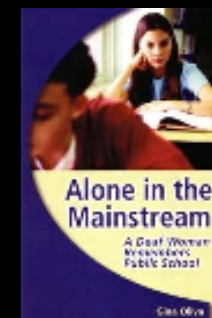


Anne Colledge

Josh Swiller



Gina Oliva



Ann Clare LeZotte



Jamie Berke- About.com & Tami Lee Santimyer-actress



For Resources highlighting children's/adolescent books with deaf characters

Check out my Blog!

\*Includes over 194 titles

– 35 books from 2007-2009

\*36 Author & Professionals Interviews

\*Websites & Articles

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<http://pajka.blogspot.com/>

